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Tanzanians express trust in police, but cite shortcomings in professional conduct

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 634 | Kelechi Amakoh and Derick Msafiri

Summary

In her two years as Tanzania's president, Samia Suluhu Hassan has made no secret of her intention to reform the country's police force. Citing corruption, use of excessive force, and offensive language as common police failings, last July she announced the creation of a committee to assess the performance of criminal justice forces, including the police (Mosenda, 2022).

While Tanzania's state institutions – including the police – consistently rank among the least corrupt in Afrobarometer surveys (Keulder, 2021), the 2020 National Governance and Corruption Survey rated the Tanzania Police Force as the most corrupt and one of the least effective public institutions in the country (Prevention and Combating of Corruption Bureau, 2020), despite attempts at reform such as community policing and the modernisation of police equipment (Mount, 2014).

This dispatch reports on a special survey module included in the Afrobarometer Round 9 (2021/2023) questionnaire to explore Africans' experiences and assessments of police professionalism.

In Tanzania, most citizens say they felt safe in their neighbourhoods and homes, though the share who report feeling unsafe has increased since 2021, with poor citizens and urban residents more likely to experience insecurity than rural and better-off citizens.

Among those who requested police assistance, more than a quarter say they had to pay a bribe – the same proportion who report having to pay a bribe in other types of police encounters. And although perceptions of corruption among public institutions have shown improvement, the police are more widely seen as corrupt than other key state institutions.

Majorities say the police at least sometimes use excessive force with protesters and criminal suspects and stop drivers without good reason, and fewer than half say the police usually operate in a professional manner and respect all citizens' rights.

Even so, most Tanzanians say they trust the police and approve of the government's performance in fighting crime.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Eight survey rounds in up to 39 countries have been completed since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2023) are currently underway. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Tanzania, led by REPOA, interviewed a nationally representative sample of 2,400 adult citizens in September-October 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 percentage points at a 95% confidence

level. Previous surveys were conducted in Tanzania in 2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, and 2021.

Key findings

- Three-fourths of Tanzanians say they “never” felt unsafe while walking in their neighbourhood (75%) or feared crime in their home (74%) during the previous year, while 25% and 26%, respectively, report experiencing these forms of insecurity at least once during the previous year.
 - The share of citizens who report feeling unsafe or fearing crime at least “several times” has increased by 6-8 percentage points compared to 2014, 2017, and 2021.
 - Poor citizens and urban residents are considerably more likely to report insecurity than their better-off and rural counterparts.
- About one in 10 citizens (9%) say they requested police assistance during the previous year, while 24% say they encountered the police in other situations, such as at checkpoints, during identity checks or traffic stops, or during an investigation.
 - Among citizens who asked for help from the police, 60% say it was easy to get the assistance they needed, but 28% say they had to pay a bribe.
 - Among those who encountered the police in other situations, the same proportion (28%) report having to pay a bribe to avoid problems.
- Almost three in 10 Tanzanians (28%) say that “most” or “all” police are corrupt – one of the best ratings across 34 African countries surveyed in 2021/2022, but still the worst among 11 Tanzanian institutions and leaders the survey asked about.
- But eight in 10 respondents (79%) say they trust the police, including 46% who trust them “a lot.”
- Even so, significant proportions of the population say the police “often” or “always” use excessive force with suspected criminals (42%) and protesters (28%), stop drivers without good reason (37%), and engage in criminal activities (11%).
- Overall, 45% of Tanzanians say the police “often” or “always” operate in a professional manner and respect all citizens’ rights, while about half as many (24%) say they “rarely” or “never” do.
- Public approval of the government’s performance on crime reduction remains strong (74%), though it has declined by 12 percentage points since 2019.

Sense of security

Citizens’ evaluations of their police depend to a great extent on how they are treated by the police, how safe they feel in their homes and neighbourhoods, and whether they have been victims of crimes (Elliott, Thomas, & Ogloff, 2011; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). Do Tanzanians feel protected?

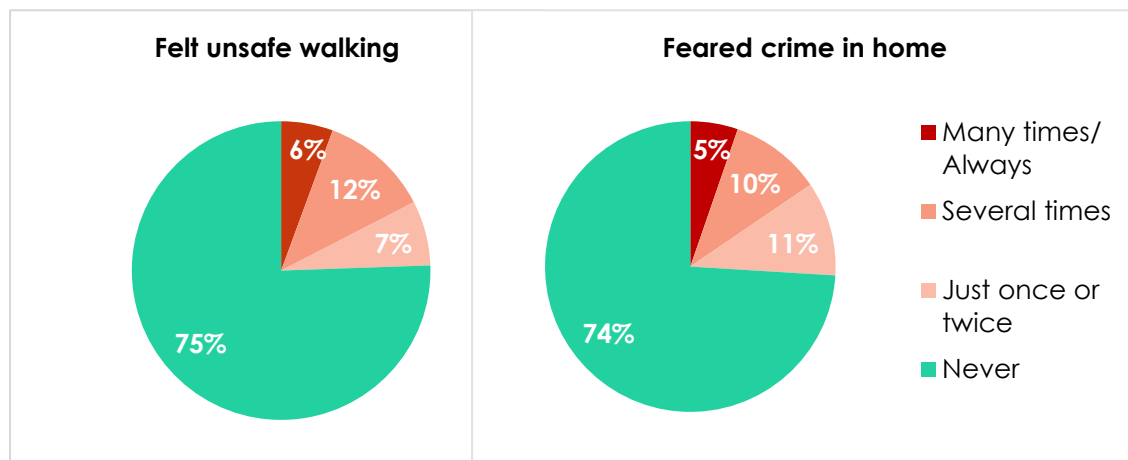
Survey responses show a fairly high sense of personal security among Tanzanians. Three-fourths of citizens say they “never” felt unsafe while walking in their neighbourhood (75%) and “never” feared crime in their home (74%) during the previous year (Figure 1).

One in four report feeling unsafe in their neighbourhood (25%) and fearing crime (26%) at least once, including 17% and 15%, respectively, who report these forms of insecurity “several times,” “many times,” or “always” during the previous year.

Despite the sense of security most Tanzanians feel, the proportions of citizens who report feeling unsafe or fearing crime at least “several times” have increased by 6-8 percentage points compared to 2014, 2017, and 2021 (Figure 2).

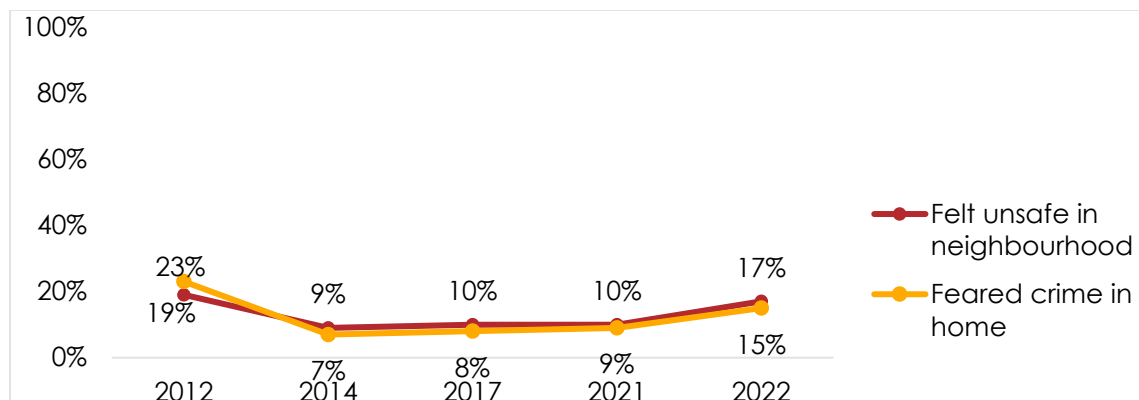
Both forms of insecurity are significantly more common in cities than in rural areas, and the poorest citizens are about three times as likely to experience them as their counterparts with no lived poverty¹ (Figure 3).

Figure 1: Insecurity and fear of crime | Tanzania | 2022



Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Felt unsafe walking in your neighbourhood? Feared crime in your own home?

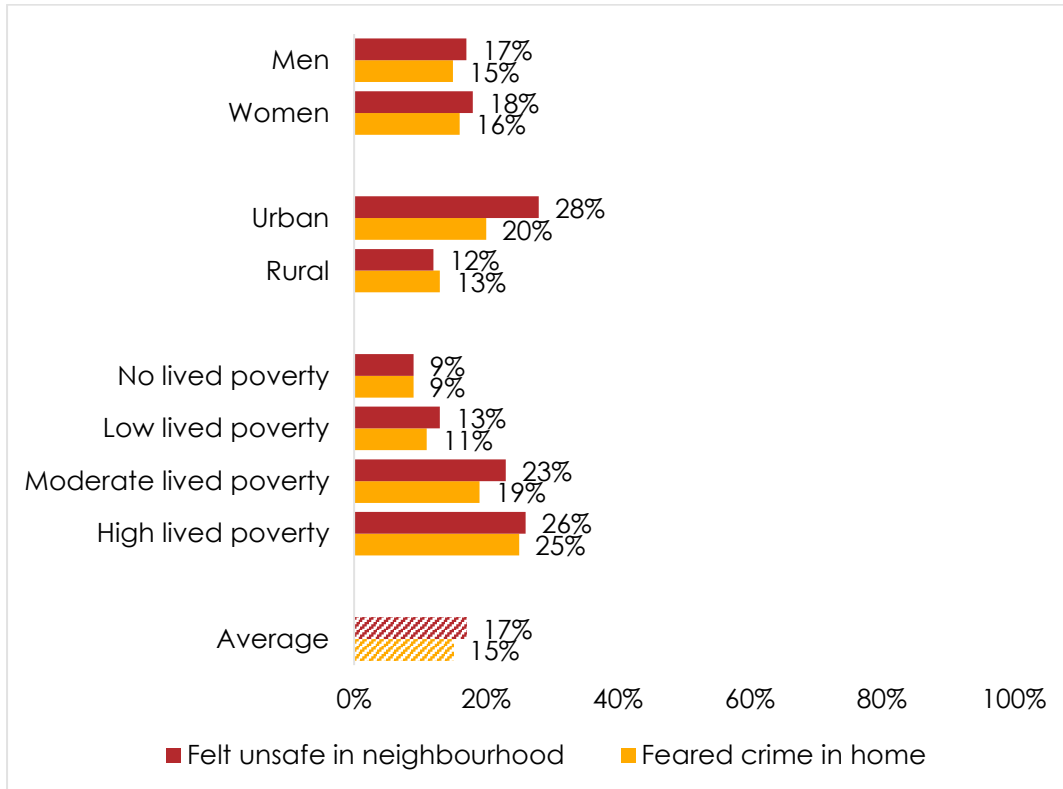
Figure 2: Experienced insecurity and fear of crime at least ‘several times’ | Tanzania | 2012-2022



Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Felt unsafe walking in your neighbourhood? Feared crime in your own home? (% who say “several times,” “many times,” or “always”)

¹ Afrobarometer’s Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents’ levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes & Patel (2020).

Figure 3: Experienced insecurity and fear of crime at least ‘several times’
 | by gender, location, and lived poverty | Tanzania | 2022



Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Felt unsafe walking in your neighbourhood? Feared crime in your own home? (% who say “several times,” “many times,” or “always”)

Police/security presence

One factor that might affect people’s sense of security is the presence of security forces. As part of their data collection process, Afrobarometer field teams make on-the-ground observations in each census enumeration area (EA) they visit about services and facilities that are available in the area. Since the EAs visited are selected to represent the population of the country, these data provide reliable indicators of infrastructure and service availability.

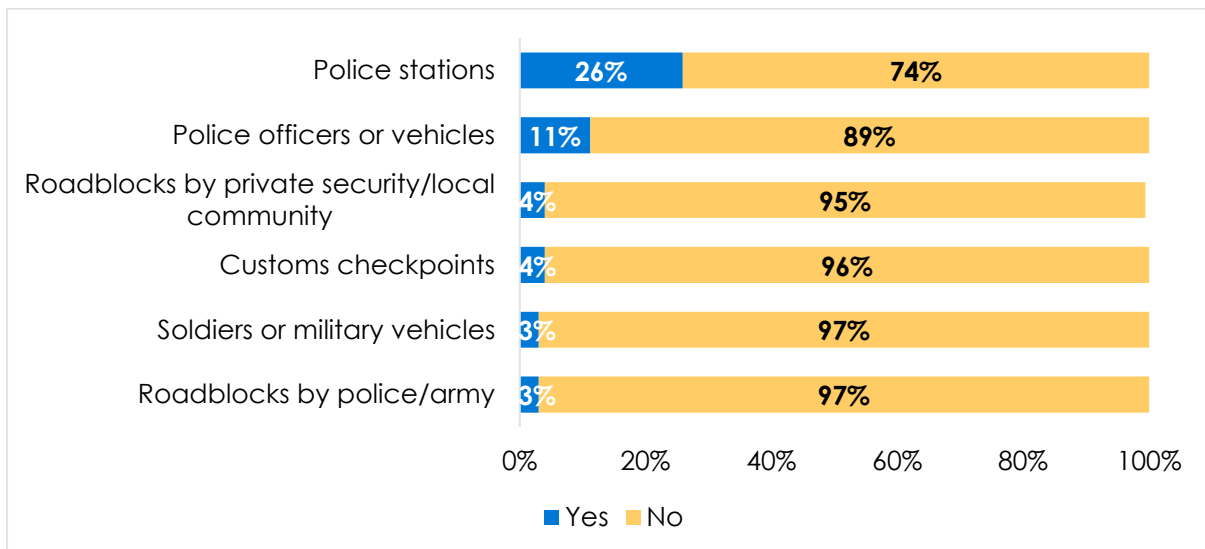
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In Tanzania, Afrobarometer field teams found police stations in or within easy walking distance of one-fourth (26%) of the EAs they visited (Figure 4). They saw police officers or police vehicles in 11% of the EAs. Other signs of security-related activity were

less common, including roadblocks by private security firms or local communities (4%), custom checkpoints (3%), soldiers or military vehicles (3%), and police or military roadblocks (3%).

Surprisingly, respondents who reside in areas with a nearby police station are more likely to report feeling unsafe (24%) and afraid of crime (21%) than those in areas without a nearby police station (15% and 14%) (Figure 5).

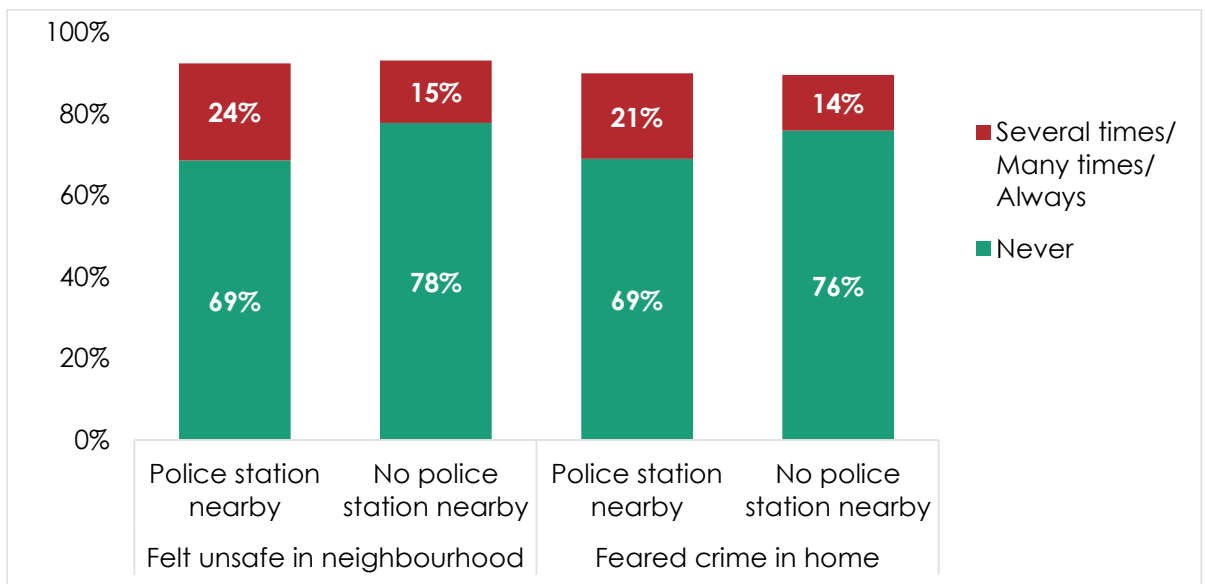
Figure 4: Presence of police/security | Tanzania | 2022



Survey enumerators were asked:

Are the following facilities present in the primary sampling unit (PSU)/enumeration area (EA) or in easy walking distance: Police station?
 In the PSU/EA, did you (or any of your colleagues) see: Any police officers or police vehicles? Any soldiers or army vehicles? Any roadblocks set up by police or army? Any customs checkpoints?
 Any roadblocks or booms set up by private security providers or by the local community?

Figure 5: Insecurity and presence of police | Tanzania | 2022



Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Felt unsafe walking in your neighbourhood? Feared crime in your own home?

Encounters with the police

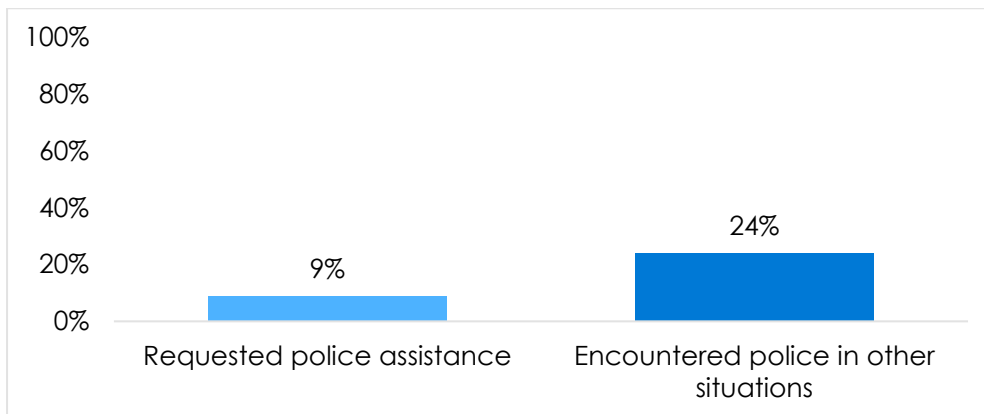
How often do Tanzanians encounter the police in their daily lives?

About one in 10 respondents (9%) say they requested police assistance during the previous year. More than twice as many (24%) say they encountered the police in other situations,

such as at checkpoints, during identity checks or traffic stops, or during an investigation (Figure 6).

Very few citizens (4%) report police contact of both types, i.e. requesting police assistance and in other, less voluntary encounters, while most (71%) say they did not interact with the police during the past year.

Figure 6: Contact with the police | Tanzania | 2022



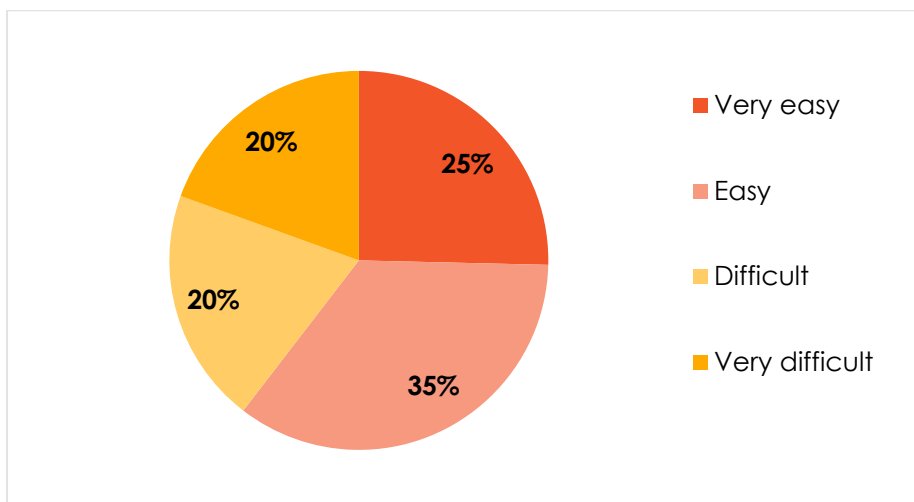
Respondents were asked:

In the past 12 months, have you requested assistance from the police?

In the past 12 months, how often have you encountered the police in other situations, like at checkpoints, during identity checks or traffic stops, or during an investigation?

Among citizens who asked for help from the police, a majority (60%) say it was “easy” or “very easy” to get the assistance they needed, while 40% say it was difficult (Figure 7).²

Figure 7: Ease of obtaining police assistance | Tanzania | 2022

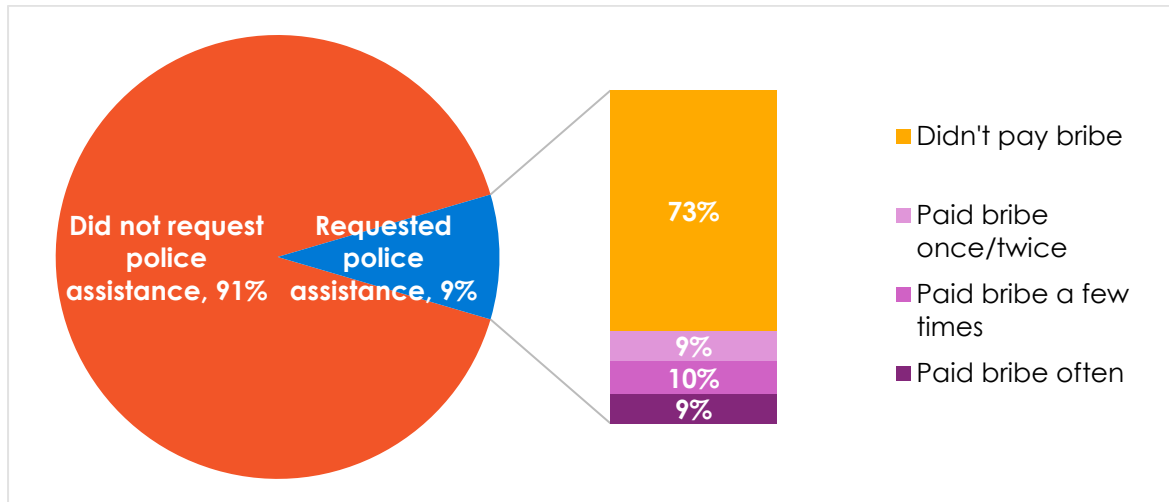


Respondents who requested police assistance during the previous year were asked: *How easy or difficult was it to obtain the assistance you needed? (Respondents who did not request police assistance are excluded.)*

² Due to rounding, percentages may total 101% or 99%, and percentages for combined categories reported in the text may differ by 1 percentage point from the sum of sub-categories shown in figures.

Among those who asked for help from the police, 28% say they had to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a police officer at least once to get the assistance they needed (Figure 8).

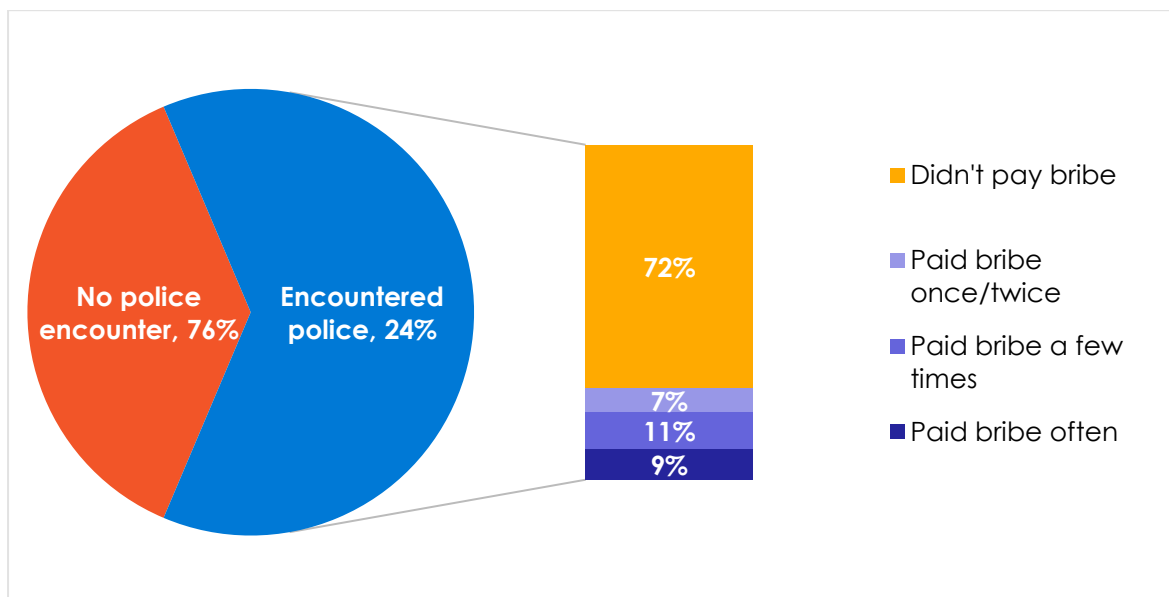
Figure 8: Paid a bribe to obtain police assistance | Tanzania | 2022



Respondents were asked: In the past 12 months, have you requested assistance from the police? (If “yes”:] How often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a police officer in order to get the assistance you needed?

Among Tanzanians who encountered the police in situations such as checkpoints, during identity checks or traffic stops, or during an investigation, the same proportion (28%) say they had to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour to avoid problems (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Paid a bribe to avoid problems with the police | Tanzania | 2022



Respondents were asked: In the past 12 months, how often have you encountered the police in other situations, like at checkpoints, during identity checks or traffic stops, or during an investigation? [If at least once:] And how often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a police officer in order to avoid a problem during one of these encounters?

To summarise the experience among all Tanzanian adults during the past year, about one in 12 (8%) paid a bribe at least once to get police assistance, to avoid a problem with the police, or both.

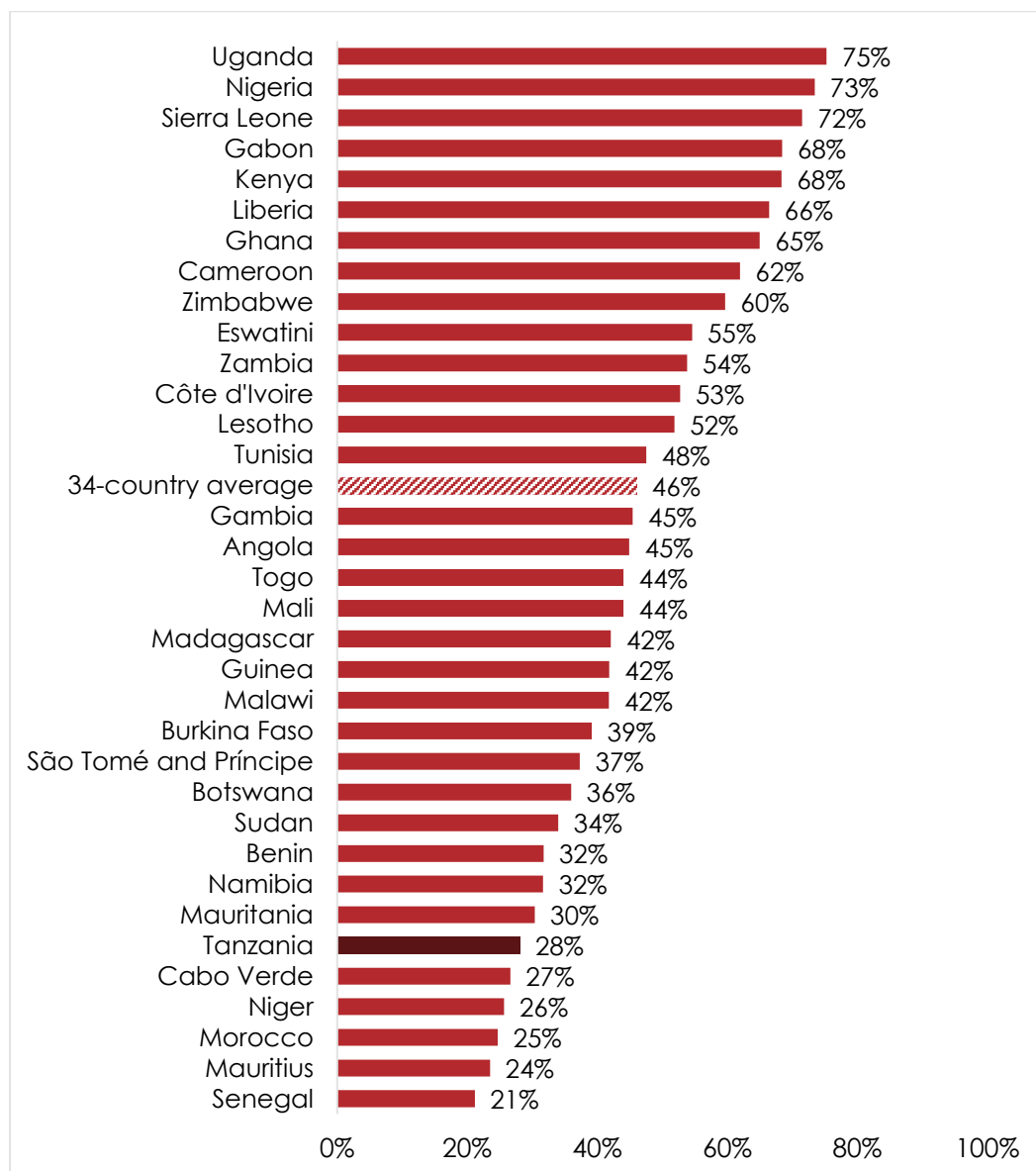
Police corruption

Almost three in 10 Tanzanians (28%) say “most” or “all” police officials are corrupt, one of the best ratings across 34 African countries surveyed in 2021/2022 (46% on average) (Figure 10).

Still, the police score considerably worse than 10 other institutions and leaders the survey asked about, including civil servants (15%), judges and magistrates (13%), tax officials (12%), members of Parliament (8%), and the Presidency (6%) (Figure 11).

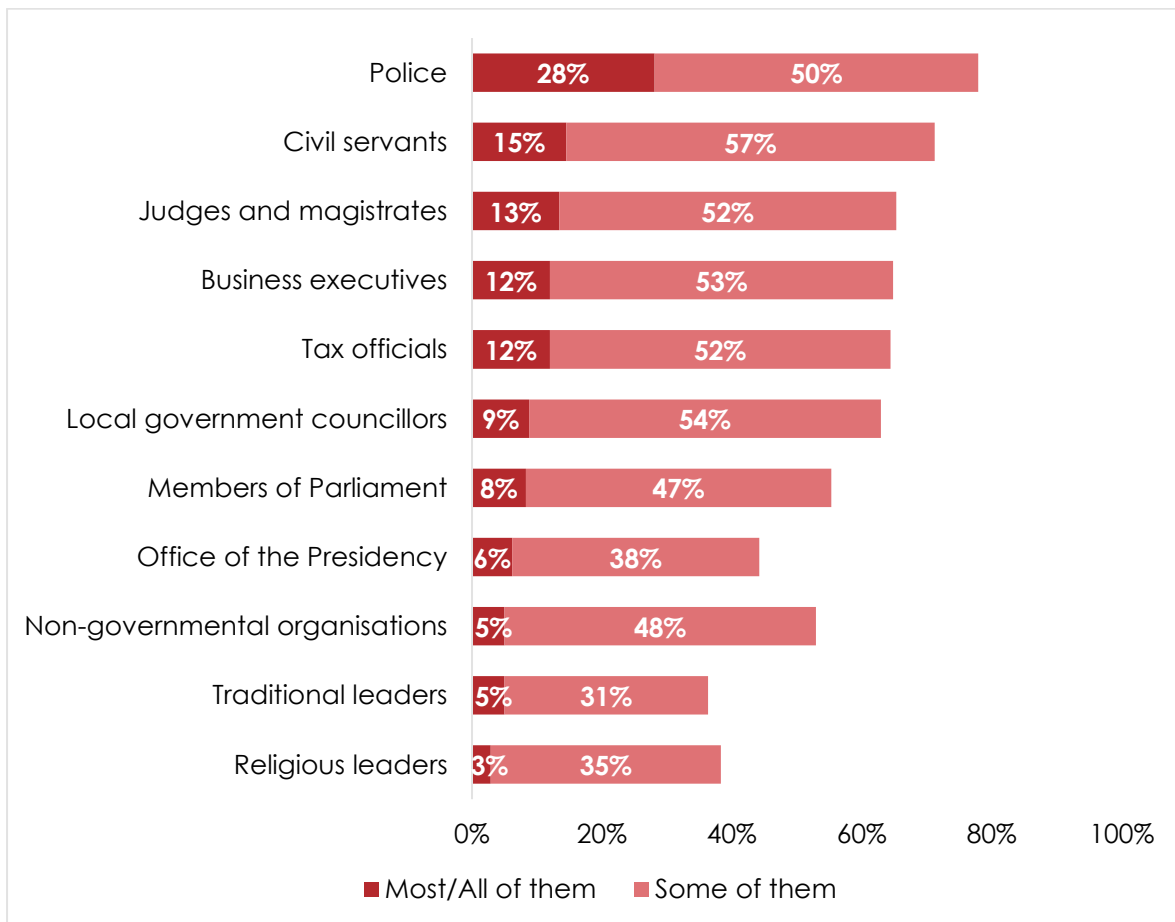
In addition, half (50%) of respondents think “some” police officials are corrupt.

Figure 10: Perception that most/all police are corrupt | 34 countries | 2021/2022



Respondents were asked: How many of the following do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Police? (% who say “most of them” or “all of them”)

Figure 11: Perceived corruption among institutions and leaders | Tanzania | 2022

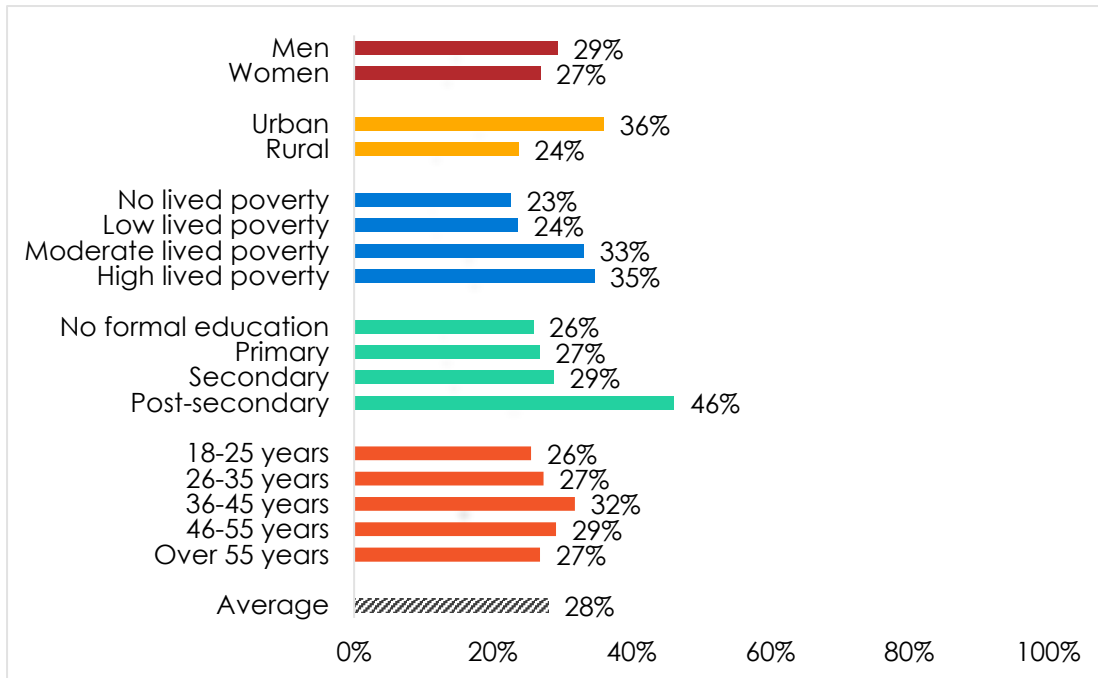


Respondents were asked: How many of the following do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

Perceptions that most/all police are corrupt are far more common among highly educated Tanzanians (46%) than those with less schooling (Figure 12). Urban residents (36%) and citizens experiencing high (35%) or moderate (33%) lived poverty are more inclined to see police corruption as widespread than rural residents (24%) and better-off respondents (23%-24%).

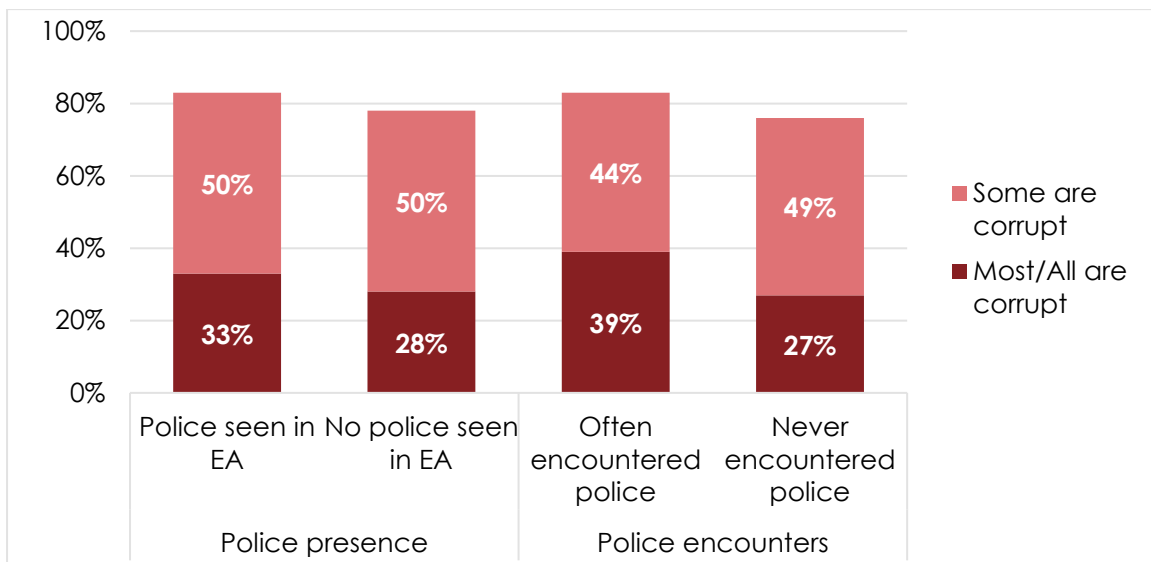
Findings also suggest a possible link between perceptions of police presence and corruption. Citizens who live in EAs where field teams saw police officers or vehicles are more likely to say that most/all police are corrupt than their counterparts in EAs where no police presence was observed (33% vs. 28%), as are respondents who had frequent encounters with the police compared to those who had no encounters (39% vs. 27%) (Figure 13).

Figure 12: Perception that most/all police are corrupt | by demographic group | Tanzania | 2022



Respondents were asked: How many of the following do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Police? (% who say "most of them" or "all of them")

Figure 13: Perceived police corruption | by police presence and frequency of interaction with police | Tanzania | 2022



Survey enumerators were asked: In the PSU/EA, did you (or any of your colleagues) see any police officers or police vehicles?

Respondents were asked:

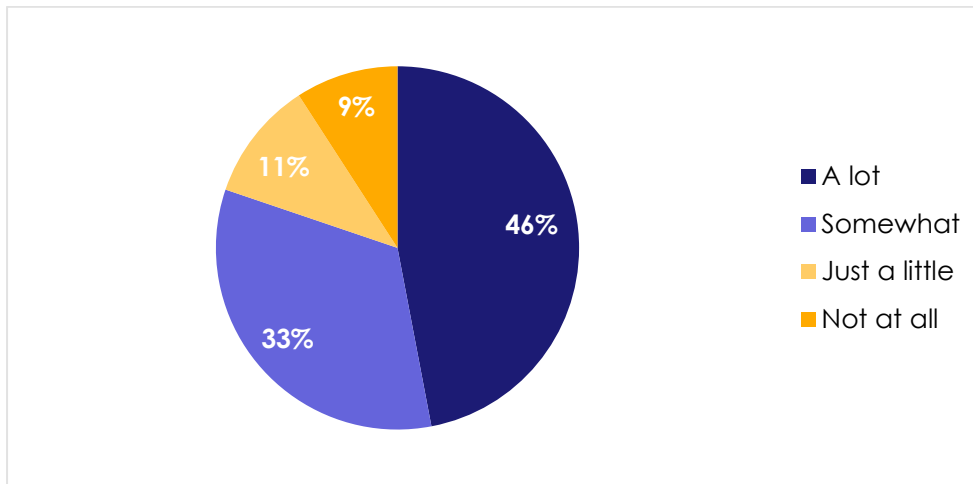
In the past 12 months, how often have you encountered the police in other situations, like at checkpoints, during identity checks or traffic stops, or during an investigation?

How many of the following do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Police?

Trust in the police

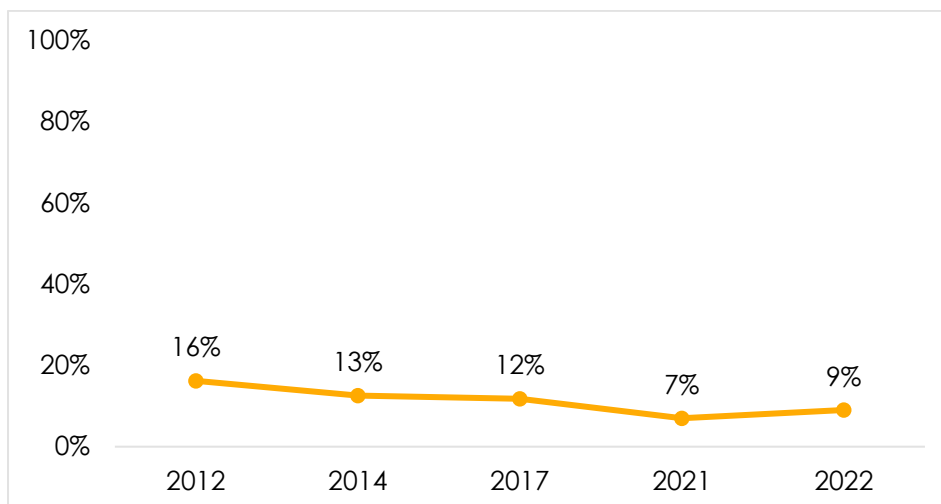
Tanzania's police enjoy high levels of public trust. Eight in 10 respondents (79%) say they trust the police "somewhat" (33%) or "a lot" (46%) (Figure 14). Over the past decade, the share of citizens who say they don't trust the police "at all" has dropped by about half, from 16% in 2012 to 9% (Figure 15).

Figure 14: Trust in the police | Tanzania | 2022



Respondents were asked: How much do you trust the police, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

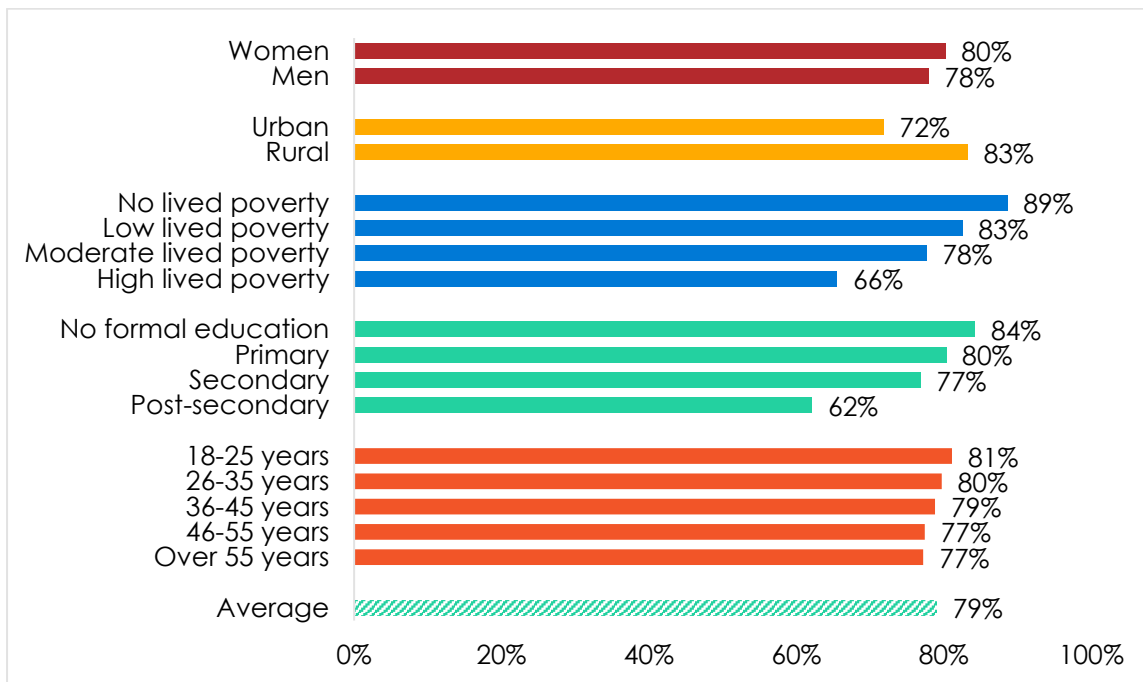
Figure 15: Don't trust the police 'at all' | Tanzania | 2012-2022



Respondents were asked: How much do you trust the police, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who say "not at all")

Rural residents (83%) express greater trust in the police than their urban counterparts (72%). Trust declines as education levels increase, ranging from just 62% among those with post-secondary qualifications to 84% among those with no formal schooling. The poorest citizens (66%) are far less likely to trust the police than their economically better-off counterparts (78%-89%) (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Trust in the police | by demographic group | Tanzania | 2022

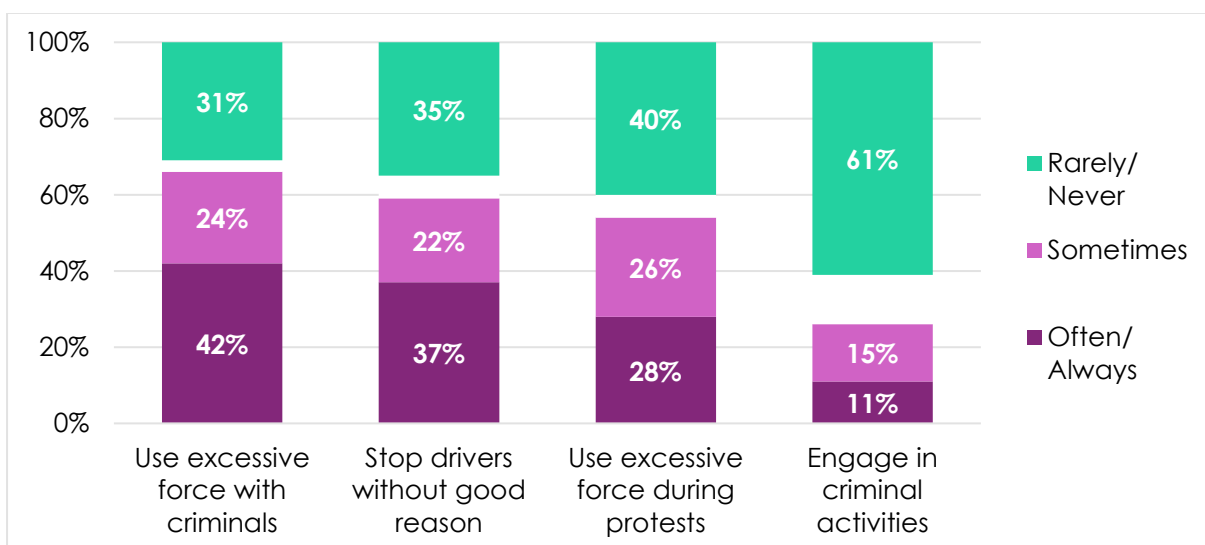


Respondents were asked: How much do you trust the police, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")

Police conduct

Despite high levels of trust, majorities are critical of police conduct (Figure 17). About two-thirds (65%) say the police at least "sometimes" use excessive force with suspected criminals, including 42% who say they do this "often" or "always." Six in 10 (59%) say they stop drivers without good reason, including 37% who see this as a frequent occurrence.

Figure 17: Improper police practices | Tanzania | 2022

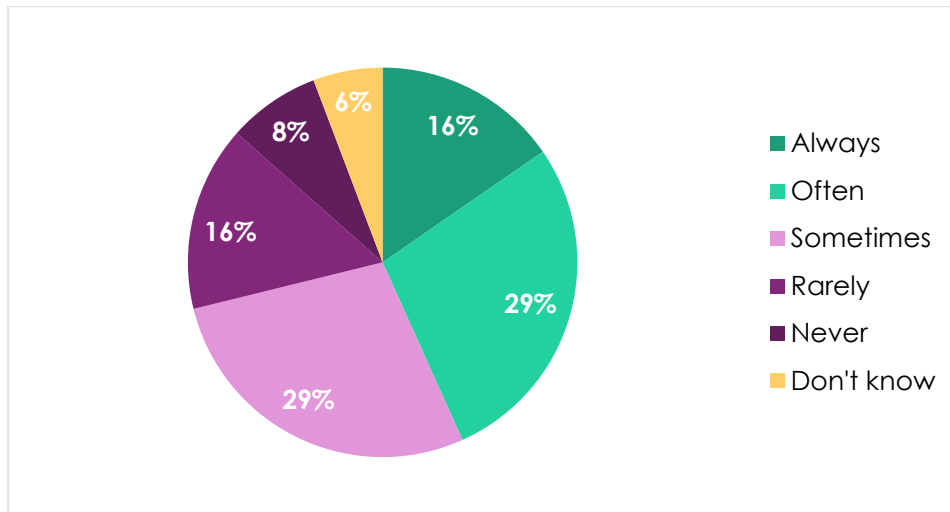


Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how often do the police in Tanzania: Stop drivers without good reason? Use excessive force in managing protests or demonstrations? Use excessive force when dealing with criminals? Engage in criminal activities?

A slim majority (53%) complain of excessive force in managing protests, at least “sometimes,” while 26% believe the police engage in criminal activities, at least on occasion.

Overall, fewer than half (45%) of Tanzanians say the police “often” or “always” operate in a professional manner and respect all citizens’ rights, while 29% say this happens only “sometimes” and 24% consider such professional conduct rare or unheard of (Figure 18).

Figure 18: Do the police act professionally and respect citizens’ rights? | Tanzania | 2022

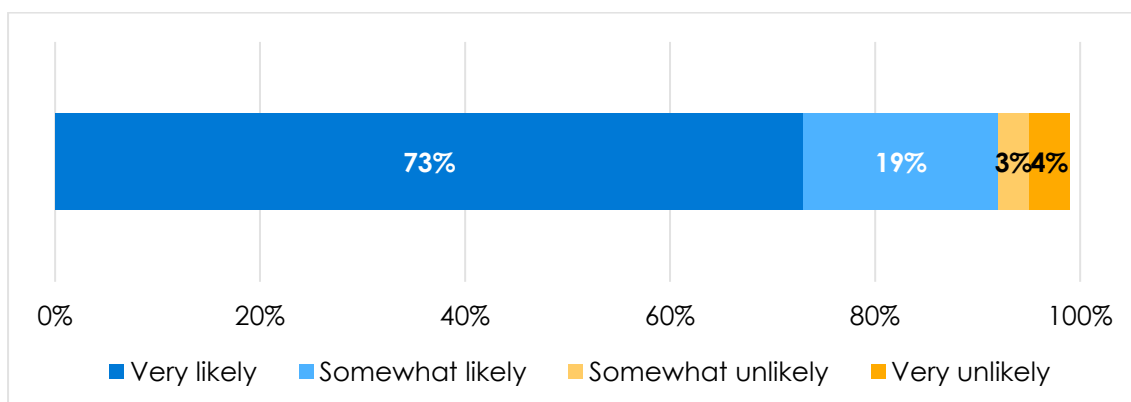


Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how often do the police in Tanzania operate in a professional manner and respect the rights of all citizens?

When it comes to gender-based violence, Tanzanians overwhelmingly trust their police to treat reported cases as serious offences: More than nine out of 10 respondents (92%) consider this likely, including 73% who see it as “very likely” (Figure 19).

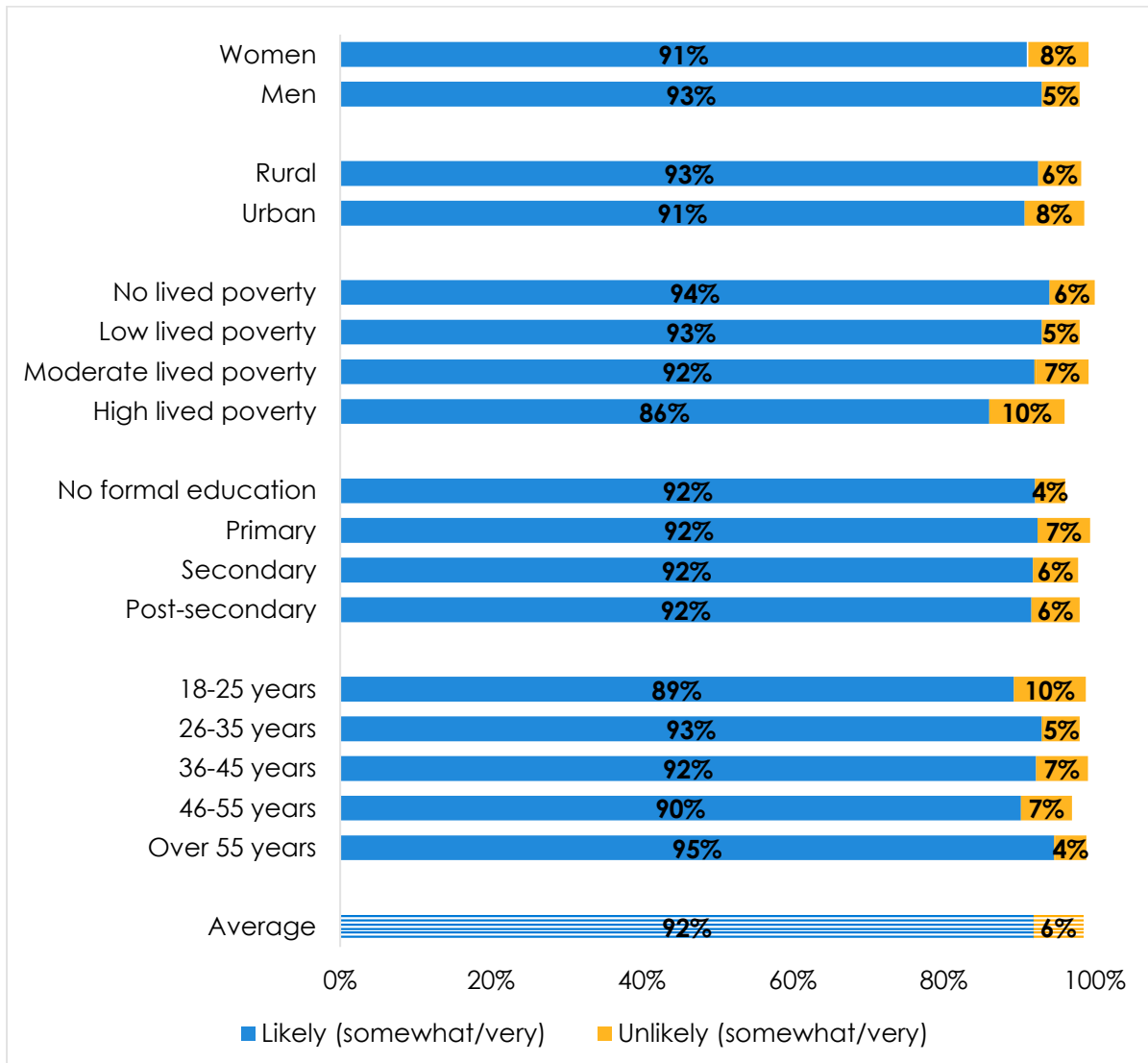
This assessment is shared across key demographic groups, including by women (91%), though confidence is slightly less strong among the poorest citizens (86%) (Figure 20).

Figure 19: Do the police take gender-based violence seriously? | Tanzania | 2022



Respondents were asked: If a woman in your community goes to the police to report being a victim of gender-based violence, for example, to report a rape or report being physically abused by her husband, how likely or unlikely is it that her case will be taken seriously by the police?

Figure 20: Do the police take gender-based violence seriously? | by demographic group | Tanzania | 2022

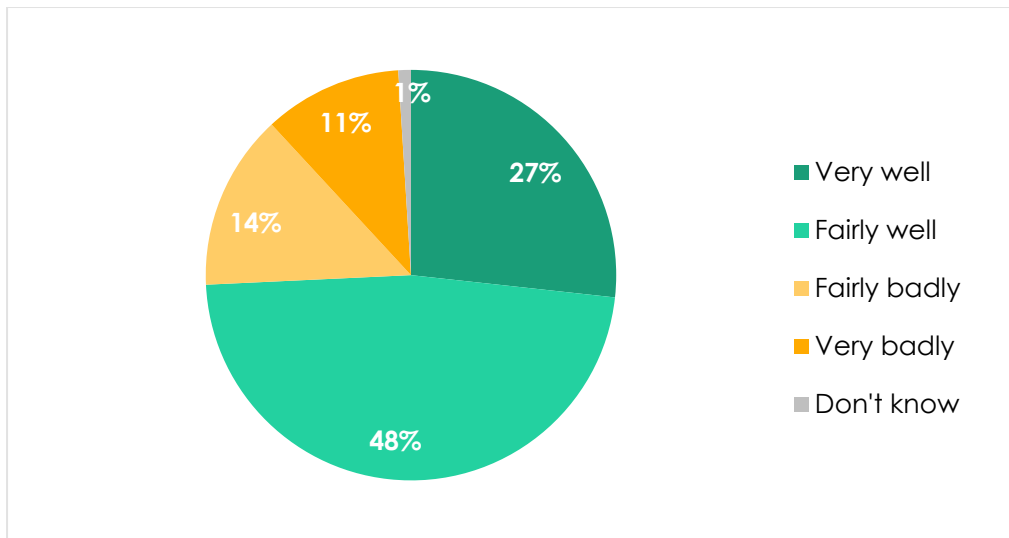


Respondents were asked: *If a woman in your community goes to the police to report being a victim of gender-based violence, for example, to report a rape or report being physically abused by her husband, how likely or unlikely is it that her case will be taken seriously by the police?*

Government performance on reducing crime

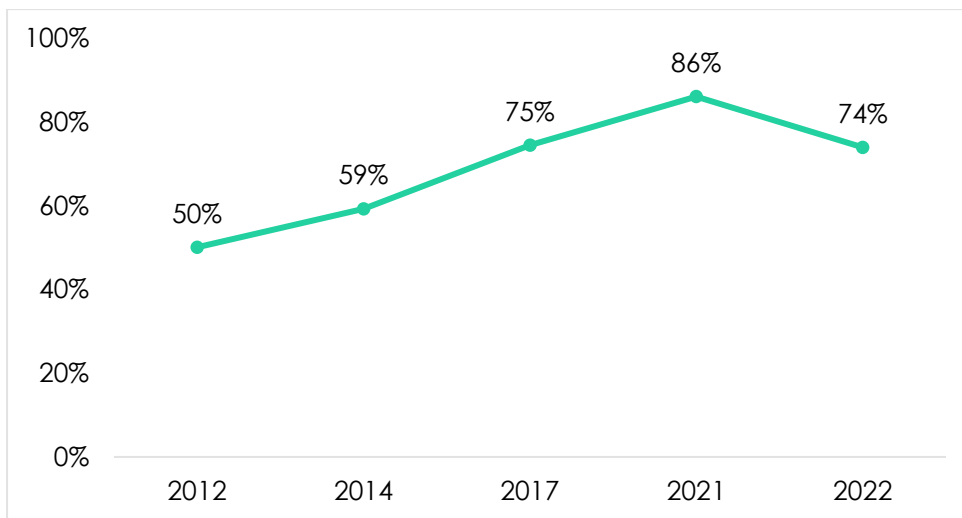
Three-fourths (74%) of Tanzanians say their government is doing a “fairly good” or “very good” job of reducing crime (Figure 21). While this level of approval far exceeds assessments recorded in 2011-2014 (50%-59% approval), it reflects a 12-percentage-point decline from 2019 (86%) (Figure 22).

Figure 21: Government performance on reducing crime | Tanzania | 2022



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling reducing crime, or haven't you heard enough to say?

Figure 22: Government performing well on crime reduction | Tanzania | 2022



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling reducing crime, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "fairly well" or "very well")

Conclusion

Survey findings suggest that ending police corruption remains a major challenge for Tanzania. Many citizens also see the police as prone to abuses and lacking in professionalism and respect for citizens' rights.

Nonetheless, most Tanzanians express trust in the police and appreciation for the government's anti-crime efforts, providing a solid foundation for further efforts to shape a model force.

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